

do have direct evidence however, supplied by Penfield, of patients responding to direct electrical stimulation by electrodes implanted in the human brain. He reports several cases in which the patient was stimulated to have hallucinatory sense data as of scenes seen or heard through the normal channels of sense. (*The Excitable Cortex in Conscious Man* by Wilder Penfield, F.R.S., Liverpool, 1958.) Most of these 'wild' brain-data of Penfield appear to relate to the *past* of the patient and would therefore be *recasts* rather than *precasts* in my sense. (He quotes an interesting case on page 29 which might refer to a *precast* however.) Also the stimuli were particles of mathematically real mass and energy viz electrons. But the procedure illustrates the kind of interaction I have in mind. One would not expect precasts in ordinary life to be perceived unless the mind was so to speak in a 'blank' receptive state, so that the induced presentations would not be submerged by the normal sense data coming up from the peripheral sense organs. A similar requirement obtains in the case of *after* images, which are not normally discernible unless one looks at a blank white or dark surface (though they are in fact present, submerged in the normal flood of varied sense data), after looking at any specially bright surface.

AN AUTOMATIST'S SCRIPTS COMPARED WITH SOME ORIGINAL WRITINGS BY THE ALLEGED COMMUNICATOR

by SIMEON EDMUNDS

THE phenomenon of automatic writing has been a subject of controversy throughout the history of psychical research. Although it is generally accepted that there is nothing of a paranormal nature in the process itself, there is no such unanimity of opinion concerning the source of much of the material produced in this way, particularly that purporting to be communicated from the spirits of the dead. Discounting the trivial and manifestly non-evidential outpourings of the lunatic fringe, there is still a large amount of material, for example the scripts of the 'SPR Group' forming the famous cross-correspondences, which does seem to offer *prima facie* evidence of communication from the dead.

In any given case several paranormal and non-paranormal

possibilities call for consideration. Some paranormal possibilities are; that the material is what it purports to be, that it is telepathically obtained from the mind of a living person, or that it is obtained clairvoyantly from existing objects or records. Non-paranormal possibilities are that the material is within the subliminal memory of the automatist and is 'released' by a condition of dissociation,¹ or that normally acquired, consciously remembered information is set out in a manner deliberately calculated to deceive. Any combination of these (or other) possibilities, may, of course, be the explanation.

Few who argue over the sources of automatists' scripts appear completely objective in their attitudes. Those predisposed towards survival tend to ignore the law of parsimony, while the more sceptical often take too big a cut with Occam's razor. The investigator who pursues an objective course is nobody's friend. He suffers both the believer's invective and the sceptic's scorn.

This controversy has been spotlighted recently by the publication of a new book, *Swan on a Black Sea*, by Miss Geraldine Cummins, one of the best known present-day automatists. Like her earlier writings, this book has been widely accepted as evidence of survival. Unfortunately reasoned criticism of its evidential value has resulted in displays of emotionalism from some whose will to believe seems stronger than their desire for truth. Without entering into the *Swan on a Black Sea* argument, some light may be cast on the general question by consideration of some passages in an earlier book by Miss Cummins, *The Fate of Colonel Fawcett*.

This book consists largely of a number of scripts, purportedly from the explorer Colonel P. H. Fawcett, who disappeared in 1925 while on an expedition into the Brazilian jungle. Miss Cummins makes no claims concerning the source of the scripts, leaving the reader to form his own opinion, but her friend, Miss E. B. Gibbes, who sat with her for the production of the scripts and prepared them for publication, and who wrote the introductory chapters, makes clear her own conviction that Fawcett was the communicator. The passages to be quoted appear at the beginning of chapter four, and are from alleged communications from Fawcett in scripts written during March 1949. They are set out below for comparison with extracts from an article by Fawcett himself, entitled 'The Occult Life', which appeared in the *Occult Review*, Vol. XXXVIII, in 1923.

¹ The remarkable extent to which past experiences—even quite trivial ones—are subconsciously remembered is well known. It is a principle of psychoanalysis and can be readily demonstrated by the use of hypnosis.

MISS CUMMINS'S SCRIPTS

Fear is as deeply-rooted in the germ-plasm as the instinct of self-preservation, and it is the very essence of self. . . . Fear is the most difficult of all human failings to cure. . . . Fear is intimately connected with emotion. . . . Emotion is the outward expression of an imperfectly evolved human being. In civilizations at their prime, the control of emotion distinguishes the superior section of the people. During decline, when the superior element is being replaced by the inferior, emotionalism prevails in all sections of society.

In earth life, the vital energy available to human beings is limited. Emotional human beings are extravagant spenders of energy; they rapidly exhaust the most liberal reserves. . . . I had realised that we waste vital energy every moment of an unguarded waking day in emotional disturbance and unnecessary physical movement.

Animals are less diffusive of their vitality than are human beings; but we may, through contact with them, absorb beneficially their coarser energy, and bad health can gain much from domestic pets. The vegetable kingdom conserves its vitality even more than animals, but I had evolved a method by which its energy might be extracted.

I stood with my back against a tree of vigorous, healthy growth, with my head and finger-tips close to the trunk. I breathed deeply and slowly, willing the extraction of the vitality of the tree with each indrawn breath. But energy required for the functions of the human body are obtainable from other sources than plant and animal life [*sic*]. Christ had a complete

P. H. FAWCETT'S ARTICLE

Fear is without exception the most difficult of all human failings, being deeply rooted in the germ-plasm as the instinct of self-preservation and the very essence of self. It is intimately connected with emotion, which in itself is illogical. For emotion is the outward and visible expression of an imperfectly evolved monad. . . . In all civilizations at their prime the control of emotion distinguishes the superior element of the people; during decline, when the superior element is being rapidly replaced by the inferior, emotionalism prevails in all sections of society.

The vital energy available for reckless expenditure in this life is limited. We do not control its production, but waste it grievously. . . . We waste it every moment of an unguarded waking day in emotional disturbance and unnecessary physical movement, to say nothing of protective measures against antipathetic influences unavoidable in large populations.

The animal kingdom is less diffusive of its vitality than man. Yet contact permits the coarser quality of its vital energy to be absorbed beneficially by us. Poor health may gain much from domestic pets; abundant health may lose something. In the vegetable kingdom this conservatism of the animal is more pronounced; for the vitality of plants is difficult to extract.

Stand with your back against a tree of vigorous growth, the head and palms of the hands close to the trunk, particularly the finger tips; breathe deeply and slowly, exercising the 'will' to extract the vitality of the tree with each indrawn breath. The energy required for the functions of the human body is obtainable from other sources than plant or animal

Miss Cummins's Scripts *contd.*
knowledge of those other sources
and of how they might be tapped.

Ordinary men and women are unable consciously to draw vital force such as I have described, because of their ignorance of the necessary methods to be practised. But they can conserve vital energy if there is a complete absence of emotional disturbance—if they close the door to mental excitement.

P. H. Fawcett's Article *contd.*
life, upon which we are at present dependent. There is a reservoir which may be tapped.

Methods are at fault, not the principle. We are all working more or less in the dark. There are cases where the powers of a psychic healer are simply amazing, but it is a temporary and not a permanent gift, whose explanation is obscure. We should always bear in mind that where any association between the Two Worlds is desired, be it for medical or another purpose, complete absence of emotional disturbance is essential. Mental excitement closes the door.

The present writer prefers to make no comment on these quotations, and like Miss Cummins leaves the reader to form his own opinion. Observations on some statements made by Miss Gibbes in the book may, however, prove helpful. For instance, her claim (page 145) that the Fawcett scripts were mainly communicated 'in the language of thoughts or images and not of words' seems difficult to reconcile with the correspondence of words shown above, however that is explained.

In a footnote (page 19) Miss Gibbes states: 'Colonel Fawcett was acquainted with psychical research. . . . I was not aware of this fact and, indeed, knew nothing about him personally when these scripts were written'. It is difficult to accept that Miss Gibbes knew nothing about Fawcett or his interest in psychical research. During the years immediately preceding his disappearance he contributed several articles to the *Occult Review* which made his interest quite clear. At this time both Miss Gibbes and Miss Cummins were also writing for the *Occult Review* and it is hard to see how they could fail to notice his articles. For the same reason it would be expected that if the scripts were in fact from the surviving Fawcett he would know something of Miss Gibbes and Miss Cummins. No such recognition is recorded in the book.

Miss Cummins's standing as an automatist is said to rest 'upon ten books the contents of which are beyond her personal knowledge, and which are written in a variety of literary styles; and upon innumerable communications the accuracy of which have been ratified by most stringent tests'. These 'communications' are claimed to contain 'so many proofs of survival and the

communication of so many facts unknown to Miss Cummins and her "sitters", that the genuineness of her gift of automatic writing cannot be questioned by any unprejudiced investigator'. It is also claimed that 'one record of a sitting, the results of which proved capable of complete authentication, was published in *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, by Sir William Barrett, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, an organisation which demands the fulfilment of the most stringent conditions before accepting as authentic any communication or other psychic phenomena' (page 146).

The last sentence could easily mislead. It rather implies that the S.P.R., as a body, does accept *some* communications or other psychic phenomena as authentic, and some may infer from it that Miss Cummins's scripts have been so accepted.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

I found these correspondences in a search through Fawcett's articles published in the *Occult Review*, made at the suggestion of Mr F. Clive-Ross, editor of *Tomorrow* magazine. It is only fair to state, however, that a similar discovery was made by Mr J. R. Henderson in 1963. His report was not published, and I did not learn of his work until after my own research had been carried out.
S.E.

REVIEWS

SWAN ON A BLACK SEA: A STUDY IN AUTOMATIC WRITING. By Geraldine Cummins. Edited by Signe Toksvig, with a Foreword by C. D. Broad. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965. lxii + 168 pp. 35s.

This is a series of scripts of outstanding interest. They were obtained between 1957 and 1960 through Geraldine Cummins by means of automatic writing. The ostensible communicator was Mrs Coombe-Tennant who died in 1956 at the age of 82. She is best known to psychical researchers as 'Mrs Willett', her pseudonym when she was obtaining (by automatic writing) scripts which formed part of the system of cross-correspondences in the early part of this century. The identity of Mrs Tennant with the automatic writer Mrs Willett was known to only a few people, not to her own family.

Professor Broad contributes a 46-page foreword which is written with his customary clarity and acumen. It includes a chronological table of the main events connected with the life of Mrs Tennant